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## Report of the Director of City Services

### Executive Board

Date:

**Subject: DEPUTATION TO COUNCIL – REPRESENTATIVES OF THE LEEDS LICENSED TAXI TRADE REGARDING CONCERNS OVER INSUFFICIENT TAXI RANKS IN LEEDS**

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

City and Hunslet

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. A deputation from the Leeds Licensed Taxi Trade was made to the Council Meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007. The deputation outlined the Trade's disappointment at the lack of progress of the City Centre Taxi Rank Review Project.
2. This report provides the background and current position of the taxi rank review project.
3. A draft traffic regulation Order is being advertised at the present time which will allow the Council's Parking Services Attendants to enforce the ranks and take action against those drivers who park illegally within them.
4. The report also outlines the other actions being pursued and explains the reason for the project being undertaken in stages.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 To consider the points raised by representatives of the Leeds Licensed Taxi Trade at the Council Meeting held on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007 where they expressed their concerns and disappointment over the time taken to carry out a review of the taxi rank provision within the City Centre.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 Following a number of representations from various parties it was agreed to carry out a review of the taxi rank provision and to amend the legal documentation appertaining to each rank to enable the Council's Parking Services staff to carry out enforcement action in line with their other decriminalized enforcement powers.
- 2.2 Discussions were held with representatives of the Licensed Taxi Trade in March 2005 when agreement was reached on where new ranks were required and which could be removed. However, it was also agreed that no ranks would be removed until all new locations were on site and operational. The agreement, whilst not meeting all of the Trade's requests, resulted in a number of new night time locations, some conversions from night time only to 24 hour facilities, plus the possibility of a new large 24 hour rank on Greek Street. These proposals except for the Greek Street one are shown on plan No TF34/54/10j which will be made available at the meeting.
- 2.3 The Trade accepted that because of competing demands for kerb side uses (eg bus stops, parking provision for retail and business customers) not all of their initial requests could be accommodated.

## **3.0 Main Issues**

### Action to address enforcement of taxi ranks

- 3.1 Following the March 2005 meeting the proposals were drafted and formal consultations were carried out in September 2005. This led to a report being considered and agreed by the Director of City Services on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2006 for the making of a parking places Order to cover all the existing taxi ranks which will enable enforcement to be carried out by the Council rather than the Police.
- 3.2 Some detailed legal considerations were required to get to this stage. It was first thought that converting all taxi ranks to be enforceable by the Council was best achieved by introducing specific parking place Orders. However following similar work by others elsewhere in the country it came to light that some fairly recent Government amendments to current legislation meant this was no longer the correct way to proceed. Further legal advice was obtained as to how best to proceed whilst still achieving the same objectives. If the Traffic Regulation Orders do not refer to all the correct legislation / clauses then the loopholes will be exploited by those seeking to avoid enforcement action for parking at a taxi rank.
- 3.3 The legal matters have now been resolved and an Order is currently being advertised with the closing date for comments being the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007. Shortly following that date if no objections are received then the Order will be made and sealed allowing appropriate enforcement action to be carried out. The attached plan No TF34/54/10k indicates the proposals currently being advertised. All the signs and markings associated with the taxi ranks are being reviewed and any anomalies will be rectified as soon as possible in order not to jeopardize enforcement actions.

- 3.4 The advertised Order covers all of the existing 24 hour and part time ranks in the City Centre as well as introducing two new night time ranks as requested by the taxi Trade.

#### Additional 24 hour ranks

- 3.5 The conversion of part time ranks to 24 hour ones plus the new large 24 hour rank proposal still have to be progressed. These have been separated from the others because it is more likely that objections will be received, which would hold up the other changes. The promotion of the new 24 hour ranks has been delayed, but is work has now started on preparing the draft orders.

#### Use of bus stops as additional night time ranks

- 3.6 As part of the discussions with the taxi trade representatives and other parties such as the Police it is also intended to add to the night time rank provision by utilising some bus stops as taxi ranks after the bus services have finished. Again the stops in question are those identified by the trade and the Police. The objective here is to help disperse city centre revelers out of the City Centre as quickly as possible.
- 3.7 Whilst agreement has been reached with all parties including Metro, we have been informed by Government Office officials that this is not permitted under the current Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions, as the prescribed signs and markings contained within that document are not authorized for such uses. Consideration is being given as to how this can be overcome and it is likely that the Council will have to apply for special authorization before this form of measure can be pursued further. The consequence of not obtaining special authorization is that the new ranks could not be enforced and in fact such action would also negate the legality of the current bus stops.

#### Overview of the number of existing and proposed ranks

- 3.8 The general aim of the review work is to rationalise the locations and size of the ranks with the general objective of providing larger ranks where other kerb side demands permit.
- 3.9 The existing situation currently provides 116 spaces in a total of 23 ranks available twenty four hours throughout the City Centre, together with an additional 98 spaces within 24 other ranks available during the evenings and/or night time.
- 3.10 The draft traffic regulation Order currently being advertised includes the spaces identified in 3.9 plus providing an additional 9 part time spaces at 2 new locations.
- 3.11 The proposals as agreed with the taxi trade in March 2005 will ultimately provide a total of 125 spaces in 23 ranks twenty four hours a day, together with a total of 143 part time spaces in 23 other ranks, providing a total of 268 spaces at 46 locations throughout the City Centre. Whilst there is no nationally recognised ratio of taxi rank spaces to issued licenses, when compared to the 537 licensed taxis within the Leeds District these figures give a 23% provision during the day and 50% provision during the evening/night time.
- 3.12 In addition to the City Centre rank spaces there are also 49 twenty four hour spaces in 14 ranks and 12 spaces in 2 part time ranks throughout the rest of the district.
- 3.13 It is recognised that many City Centre ranks are currently smaller than the taxi trade would prefer and because of other kerb side demands may not be exactly where

they would prefer them to be. However, the number of locations spread around the City Centre does offer the opportunity to find a taxi rank without having to walk too far.

#### Other issues raised in the deputation

- 3.14 The Deputation highlights the important role of the Trade in helping to disperse people from the city centre, thus controlling public order problems. Provision of taxi ranks is just one part of the action to address this issue. A twelve month survey is due to start imminently assessing the number of people in the district who are waiting for a taxi (unmet demand survey) and will help inform the position on ranks and licenses. This is due to be completed in Autumn 2007 and the results will be reported back to Members.
- 3.15 Comment in the deputation that the public want taxi ranks at locations that are well lit, covered by CCTV, undercover and close to hot spots are acknowledged. The City Centre is already reasonably well lit and the current programme of upgrading of all lighting across the City as part of the Street Lighting PFI project will lead to further improvement. The City Centre also already has a well developed CCTV system which is updated and expanded when the need is identified. One of the taxi ranks on Woodhouse Lane has a shelter in place which was provided by the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Section.
- 3.16 The proposed bus stop/ranks are at locations identified by the Police as current hot spots for late night revelers and once introduced will be expanded if the need is identified. The locations also accords with the locations requested by the taxi trade.
- 3.17 Regrettably the implementation of the taxi rank review has taken longer than anyone anticipated. Notwithstanding the considerable effort in reaching the current position, progress would have been quicker had resources allowed. Unfortunately there is a major national shortage of experienced traffic engineers. Despite repeated recruitment exercises the service remains under resourced and is forced to prioritise work. Projects with a fixed end date (eg traffic orders required to facilitate events such as road races on the highway) or with major road safety implications have competed for priority and contributed to the delays.
- 3.18 In expressing their concerns, the Trade have also claimed that highways officers have failed to turn up at meetings to provide progress reports. Whilst on some occasions a highways officer was not available to attend a Licensing Panel Meeting because of other commitments, written progress reports have either been provided, or verbal feed back passed through other officers. However, it is accepted that because of the delay in some cases the updates were just repeats of previous reports. Any other meetings where highways officers have been invited have been attended whenever possible, the last one being in May this year when a meeting was called to discuss the taxi situation on New Station Street and Boar Lane.

#### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 4.1 The implementation of the City Centre Taxi Rank Review Project supports council Local Transport Plan, parking enforcement and licensing policies. The taxi rank proposals are consistent with the recommendations of Scrutiny in it's reports on the policy of restricting the number of Hackney Carriage licences (2004) and avoiding alcohol misuse (2005).

#### **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

- 5.1 It is essential that the changes to the legal framework covering the taxi ranks is correct and in accordance with current guidance. Should this not be the case then any loopholes will allow offenders to avoid penalty for parking illegally.
- 5.2 A budget has been allocated for the project and funds are in place.
- 5.3 The design work is being undertaken within current staff resources.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 The Council fully appreciate the role the taxi trade plays in the movement of people around the City, especially in assisting to disperse late night revelers from the City Centre.
- 6.2 Whilst appreciating the Taxi Trade's frustration at the length of time this project has taken, subject to the resolution of any objections to the advertised order, we are now reaching a position where it will be possible to introduce the new enforcement regime by the end of August. This will provide the protection the trade has identified as a particular concern.
- 6.3 The remaining work to increase the number and size of ranks is ongoing and draft orders should be ready by the end of October 2007. The additional 24 hour ranks will then be advertised for a 28 day period, any objections will be considered and a decision on implementation will be made. However the draft orders for the bus stop ranks will need to go to Government Office for approval and therefore the timetable for progressing these is out side of the council's control.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.